

PREMIER OFFERED TO FLY TO SOVIET

Eshkol, Awakened at 2 A.M.,
Heard Russian Envoy Read
a Note Accusing Israelis

Following is a step-by-step account of the political and diplomatic moves in Israel that led to her third war with neighboring Arab states in 20 years. It is based on facts now available through reports from correspondents of The New York Times—James Feron in Jerusalem, John Finney in Washington, Sydney Gruson and Charles Mohr, who were in Israel during the war, and Seth S. King in New York.

As Israel's independence day parade was winding through Jerusalem's crowded streets on May 15, many of the spectators saw Premier Levi Eshkol lean toward Maj. Gen. Itzhak Rabin, his Chief of Staff, and whisper a few words.

What he said was the first spark to a slow-burning fuse that led to war—and altered the map of the Middle East, changed the lives of thousands of Arabs and Israelis, prompted Mr. Eshkol to offer to fly to Moscow to explain Israel's position and upset the fragile balance of political power in Israel.

Mr. Eshkol asked General Rabin not to leave Jerusalem after the parade but to stop by his house on Ben Maimon Boulevard. The Premier had just seen a report from Cairo saying that President Gamal Abdel Nasser was parading an Egyptian division through the streets on its way to the Sinai Peninsula.

On May 16, the day after the parade, Israel's 18-man Cabinet met in its large, richly paneled meeting room in the Premier's office in Jerusalem. Earlier, Mr. Eshkol and General Rabin had decided to propose a partial call-up of reserves to strengthen Israeli forces in the Negev. The Cabinet agreed.

U.N. Is Asked to Leave

Support for this move grew on May 17 after President Nasser sent additional units to the Sinai and asked the United Nations Emergency Force to leave Egyptian territory. This would leave the United Arab Republic's forces in command of Sharm el Sheikh, the strategic post controlling the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba.

When the Cabinet met on Sunday, May 21, the beginning of Israel's Old Rosh Hashana, was only one word on its agenda: "bitachon," security.

The next day, the galleries of the Knesset (Parliament), were overflowing as Premier Eshkol rose to open the summer session. In the front row of the gallery, facing the Premier, sat half a dozen army officers. To some it seemed they were sitting in judgment.

The Premier's flat, unemotional recounting of the tensions was praised by his supporters as being "sober and restrained."

But the opponents of the 72-year-old head of Government, who were growing more numerous and articulate, said that it was weak, inviting the Arabs to believe that Israel was pulling back in fear.

Blockade Announced

Early in the morning of May 23, in the cold, clear darkness that precedes the blazing sun over Jerusalem, the telephone in Mr. Eshkol's house jarred him awake. It was General Rabin, saying the United Arab Republic was blocking the Strait of Tiran. This would cut off most of Israel's oil supplies from Iran and all of her trade with East Africa.

Israeli leaders agree now that war, from that moment, seemed inevitable. But they decided to send Foreign Minister Abba Eban to Washington. He was instructed to remind President Johnson that the United States had solemnly promised Israel after the 1956 Sinai campaign that, if her forces would withdraw from Sharm el Shiek, the United States would guarantee the right of free passage for all ships.

Mr. Eban urged the Cabinet to delay any military action until Israel could warn the United States and the other world powers that the Israelis would have to fight if the Strait of Tiran was not opened. He did this, he said later, because he was haunted by the memory of 1956, when Israel won a military victory in the Sinai only to renounce most of her gains under the combined pressures of the Soviet Union and the United States.

Wanted to Avoid Blame

Mr. Eban believed that Israel should try to hold the United States, in particular, to its pledges; and if this was not possible, at least to make certain that Israel would not be judged at fault if she went to war.

When he stopped in Paris on May 24, Mr. Eban was told by the Israeli Ambassador, Walter Eytan, former Director General of the Foreign Ministry, that President Nasser would see him at once.

"Don't fire the first shot. Don't make war," the French President immediately said to him.

Mr. Eban replied that, if it was a choice of surrender or resistance, Israel would choose

clusion of members of the Opposition.

In particular, Mr. Eshkol was urged to bring in former Premier David Ben-Gurion and Maj. Gen. Moshe Dayan, hero of the Sinai fighting in 1956. Mr. Ben-Gurion and General Dayan had broken with Mapai, Israel's largest party in 1964 and formed the Rafi party.

The National Religious Party, a member of the coalition headed by Mr. Eshkol, began calling for a national front Cabinet.

Mr. Eban returned to Israel the night of Saturday, May 27. The Cabinet, which gathered later that night at the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv, was still hopelessly divided on whether to take military action. No decision was reached. But publicly there were more demands for bringing in a military man to take over the portfolio of Minister of Defense, which Mr. Eshkol held.

On the night of May 28, Mr. Eshkol sat down with his military staff at the Ministry of Defense. While he defended the indecision of the Cabinet, he listened to the generals' estimate that it would cost Israel 200 military deaths for each day of inaction.

It was also estimated that Israel's partial mobilization was costing \$15-million to \$20-million a day in lost crops and economic production.

Mr. Eshkol drove back to Jerusalem and went to bed. At 2 A. M. he was awakened to find Dmitri Chuvakin, the Soviet Ambassador, at his door.

Like 'an Ultimatum'

Pulling on trousers and a jacket over his pajamas, the Premier demanded to know the purpose of the visit. Mr. Chuvakin said that he had a note from his Government, which he read with what was later described as "the force of an ultimatum."

The Soviet Union accused the Israelis of conspiring with the so-called imperialist powers and concentrating troops on the Egyptian and Syrian borders.

Mr. Eshkol replied that, in Sinai, there were also concentrations on the Egyptian side. There were no Israeli concentrations along the Syrian border, he said, and he offered to provide transportation so that the envoy could see for himself. If necessary, Mr. Eshkol said, he would go with him.

Mr. Eshkol also offered to fly to Moscow if Soviet leaders wanted an account of Israel's position. The meeting ended with no acceptance of these offers.

On May 30, King Hussein of Jordan, long an avowed enemy of President Nasser, suddenly signed a military pact with the United Arab Republic. Israel was confronted for the first time with the unification of her two most powerful neighbors.

He Meets With Party

After conferring with army leaders, Mr. Eshkol arrived at a Mapai meeting that night in an expansive mood.

"Nu, kinderlach [so, kids], what's on your minds?" he asked.

He was told that there was growing public alarm over the seeming indecisiveness of the Government leadership.

He was told that unless he gave up the Ministry of Defense and appointed General Dayan, for the past three years

a vigorous political enemy, or fighting, there would be public demonstrations against him.

Mr. Eshkol left the meeting in anger and called on Moshe Shapiro, Minister of the Interior and a leader of the National Religious party.

Mr. Shapiro said that he would resign from the Cabinet unless Rafi and the right-wing Gahal party were brought in. If the National Religious party left the coalition, Mr. Eshkol's Government might have fallen.

Egyptian Build-up Rapid

By the afternoon of May 31 it had become obvious, as Mr. Eban told an acquaintance, that the clock was ticking too slowly on the diplomatic front and too rapidly on the military front, where the Egyptian troop build-up had replaced the blockade as Israel's chief worry. It was also obvious that the United States could find no one willing to join in forcing the blockade issue.

Mr. Eshkol's closest supporters in Mapai and in the Cabinet were concentrating on blocking the appointment of General Dayan.

"Why," one asked, "should he come in and get all the credit for the planning and work that has already been done?"

That night the Premier yielded. The next day General Dayan became Minister of Defense and the Cabinet was expanded to bring in representatives of Rafi and Gahal. Mr. Ben-Gurion was not included. At this point there was little

doubt in the government that Winston Churchill, grandson of the Minister who was in Israel as a war correspondent.

Brigadier Yoffe reminded him that he had told him him not to leave his brigade on June 4, because "something big was going to happen soon."

So, on June 5 began a six-day war. Mr. Eban said later

Mr. Eshkol sent a note to the Soviet Union, asking its help in easing the crisis.

General Dayan met the press later that day. "Asked if Israel had lost the military advantage by waiting, he replied.

"I would think just now it's too late and too early—to late to react right away against the blockade and too early to draw any conclusions on the diplomatic way of handling the matter."

Two days later, on June 5,

Israeli planes blasted the Arab

air forces on their runways. At

the same time, Israeli armored

units charged into Sinai.

Whether Israel moved be-

cause Arab planes has been

sighted heading toward Tel

Aviv is an academic ques-

tion.

The day before the attack,

Bill Maudin, the cartoonist, was

visiting an Israeli armored

Brigade in the Negev. He was

politely asked to leave but was

told to "come back later, and

you will be welcome."

Brig. Abraham Yoffe, the

bearlike commander of another

armored brigade, was more di-

rect. After the fighting, he met

Winston Churchill, grandson of the Minister who was in Israel as a war correspondent.

Brigadier Yoffe reminded him that he had told him him not to leave his brigade on June 4, because "something big was going to happen soon."

So, on June 5 began a six-day war. Mr. Eban said later

that it was the only war in history "where the victors sued for peace and the vanquished demanded unconditional surrender."

resistance. After 45 minutes, the general patted Mr. Eban's hand and complimented him on the quality of his French.

In London, Prime Minister Wilson described to Mr. Eban Britain's determination to keep the Straits of Tiran open. The possibility of a permanent international naval force in the Gulf of Aqaba was discussed, Israeli sources said later.

Encouraged, Mr. Eban flew to Washington on May 25. Three days earlier, Ephraim Evron, Minister of the Israeli Embassy, was called to the State Department. He was requested to ask his Government not to take any unilateral action for two or three days, until the United States could develop a plan for breaking the Gulf of Aqaba blockade.

Other Powers Reluctant

By the time Mr. Eban had arrived, it was evident to the Johnson Administration that more effort would be needed to get international participation in a move to break the blockade.

The British and the Canadians, who had been eager at first to join in such a move, were now less enthusiastic. The Scandinavians, the French, the Italians and other maritime nations were not enthusiastic. Only the Dutch were willing to participate.

So the Administration began what it called Operation Resgatta, a new campaign to assemble an international group. Late in the afternoon of May 26, Mr. Evron was called to the White House to arrange a meeting between Mr. Eban and the President. It was set for 7 P. M. While Mr. Evron was there, he was suddenly called in by the President.

For about an hour, Mr. Johnson spoke about what the United States was trying to do. Mr. Evron kept trying to present Israel's case, but the President talked so long that Mr. Evron did not have time to get back to escort Mr. Eban to the White House.

Confusion at the Gate

The Israeli Foreign Minister, accompanied by Avraham Harman, the Israeli ambassador, arrived at the wrong gate. Then a confused period followed in which the White House and Mr. Evron were trying to find Mr. Eban.

This ended when a guard telephoned in and said: "Some guy out here by the name of Eban says he's supposed to see the President."

After more than an hour with Mr. Johnson, the Israelis concluded that the United States was prepared to meet the commitments on free passage made after the Sinai campaign. But Mr. Johnson wanted time to see if action could be taken in the Security Council. If this attempt failed, and if the Western maritime nations failed to join in breaking the blockade, the United States would act unilaterally to open the Gulf of Aqaba.

The President, it was said, asked for about two more weeks of restraint on Israel's part to work out this plan.

Meanwhile, the pressures for a broader "war Cabinet" were mounting in Israel. Newspaper editorials demanded the in-